Saskatchewan
Agriculture
and Food

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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Week of March 26, 2007

SASKATCHEWAN PRODUCERS SWEEP MASTER GROWER AWARDS

It was an all-Saskatchewan show as the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB) presented its Master Grower Awards for the 2006/2007 crop year during the recent Grain World conference in Winnipeg.

"The Master Grower program is our way of recognizing the achievements of Canada's prairie grain farmers," said CWB agronomist Mike Grenier. "It rewards top producers and allows their knowledge to be shared with the rest of the Western Canadian grain industry."

Farmers are asked to submit a grain sample from the year's harvest to the CWB. Samples are inspected by both the CWB and quality experts, and judged on visual quality, end-use market suitability and crop management practices.

There are various classes of cereal grains under which producers can enter, including malting barley, selected red winter wheat, hard white spring wheat and durum. Awards are not necessarily made in all classes every year.

Annual award winners are invited to the CWB's Grain World outlook conference in Winnipeg, where they are presented with a commemorative plaque and a jacket bearing the Master Growers' logo, and officially inducted into the Master Growers' club. They are also invited to sit in on the various Grain World sessions.

When the CWB announced the Master Grower award winners for 2006/2007, it was a clean sweep for Saskatchewan: Paul Cherkas of Kamsack for six-row malting barley; Doug and Brenda Martin of Lumsden for two-row malting barley; Dale and Tracey Richter of Broadview for two-row malting barley; and Blain and Linda Haubrich of Glenbain for Canadian Western Amber Durum.

Brenda Martin says it was a tremendous experience. "They treated us very well, and it was really educational, a very good experience," she noted.

Martin and her husband, Doug, have a 3,500-acre farm on which they grow wheat, barley, lentils, canola, canary seed and durum. They also run about 100 head of cattle.

(more)

"We seed malting barley every year. If it doesn't go malting, we have feed for cattle, although we generally keep some back for feed either way," she said. "Our barley has always been accepted as malt. In our area, conditions are usually just right for it."

Regarding all of the Master Growers coming from Saskatchewan, Martin remarked, "It was kind of cool. We must be doing something right!"

She feels the excellent weather this past crop year made a big difference, especially when comparing Saskatchewan crops with those from Manitoba. However, Martin can't help exuding a little pride in noting that the two-row barley she and Doug grew was chosen from among 85 samples submitted.

"I wish every farmer could go through the experience to see what the Canadian Grain Commission, Grain Institute and Wheat Board are doing," she stated. "We listened to representatives from Brazil and China, and they can't say enough about the quality of grain they get from Canada."

Martin says that award recipients were also able to discuss different farming practices with producers from across the west, and to learn from their experiences.

Producers looking to enter the next round of Master Grower awards will need to have their samples to the Board by late September. Annual results and deadlines are posted on the CWB website at www.cwb.ca.

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LOVE OF BEEF INDUSTRY DRIVES SASKATCHEWAN RESEARCHER

A passion sparked early in life ultimately led Dr. Bart Lardner to become one of Western Canada's most respected beef researchers.

"I was born and raised in B.C., first in the Okanogan and then in the Peace River area where my father bought a farm," he said. "We had a hay and beef ranch up there, and that's really where the bug bit me."

Lardner didn't finish high school before he moved out into the industry, working in various ranches and feedlots for the next five to 10 years, and gaining considerable practical experience.

He eventually went back to community college and finished his Grade 12. From there, he completed a two-year diploma course in animal health at Alberta's Fairview College. In 1984, he came to the University of Saskatchewan, obtaining a Bachelor's degree, Master's degree and finally a Ph.D. in 1998. "I got the bug to learn after I had all that practical experience," Lardner said.

"Growing up on the farm and working at all those jobs showed me that I had a great passion for this industry. I wanted to become an intermediary between the industry, the producers and the researcher; to try to help advance the whole sector through the kind of work I do."

Lardner is a Senior Research Scientist headquartered at the Western Beef Development Centre (WBDC), a division of the Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute (PAMI). He works primarily out of the Termuende Research Farm located east of Lanigan, a facility Lardner calls "a laboratory for beef cattle research."

The focus of his work is applied cow-calf and forage management, "looking at the usage of annual and perennial forages in the management system of the beef cow, both in summer and winter feeding programs."

In May of 2005, Lardner was named the Chair for Cow-Calf Research and Development under the Strategic Research Program (SRP) administered by Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food.

The position has allowed him to take his work to another level. "I was with WBDC in more of an extension role. Now I've migrated to more of a research and extension role," Lardner said. "The SRP has allowed me to build a very strong program as it relates to the cow-calf sector and the cow-calf industry in Saskatchewan."

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Lardner appreciates every opportunity he has to participate in outreach activities. Never shy about sharing his knowledge with others in the beef industry, he appears frequently as a guest speaker at various conferences.

"I thoroughly enjoy getting out and doing many, many talks, be it to producer audiences, scientific seminars, or even teaching at the university," he said. "One of the ideal benefits of this position is that extension role, that ability to move the information directly to the industry through speaking engagements and field days and such."

Most of the research projects Lardner undertakes are directly applicable to the average producer. Among his present activities is finding less expensive and more efficient approaches to the winter feeding of cattle.

"Winter feeding is 60 to 65 per cent of the cost of maintaining a cow every year, and if we can do that cheaper, all the better," he said. "So we're currently studying field feeding systems as an alternative to feeding cows in a dry lot or a pen situation."

The WBDC is also initiating a three-year study to look at the difference between spring calving, which is traditional in the beef industry in Western Canada, and summer calving, which would take place in May or June.

"The idea is to try to have cows calve closer to when pasture quality is the best in that summertime period, and not have them calve in those cold winter months when farmers incur a lot of inconvenience, overhead and facility cost," Lardner explained.

"So we're looking at the differences in how we feed the cow or the calf, the cost for each of the two systems, and the effect on the reproductive performance of the beef cow."

Lardner is very excited about a project on the horizon that ties beef production with one of North America's fastest growing industries – bioenergy. "There are lots of by-products that are going to be coming from industries like ethanol, and we want to see how they might work into a beef cow feeding program," he noted.

"So we'll be starting a study this fall looking at supplementing beef cow winter rations with dry distillers grains. I think they're going to work very well as an energy protein supplement to a low-quality roughage type of feed, and enable us to winter that cow quite economically."

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CAN SMALL PRODUCERS PLAY SUCCESSFULLY WITH THE BIG BOYS?

Saskatchewan is home to nearly 30 per cent of Canada's cow herd, but the province continues to be a smaller player in the cattle feeding industry.

"Saskatchewan has many natural advantages to offer the cattle feeding industry," said Bill Kowalenko, Livestock Development Specialist with Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF). "We have lots of open space and abundant feed, to name just two of our advantages."

One factor that has been considered a constraint to development is the notion of size. It is often assumed that cattle feeders cannot be competitive or efficient unless their operations are large – really large.

Economists refer to this concept as "economies of scale." In the low margin business of cattle feeding, larger operations may have certain economic advantages over smaller feedlots. For instance, buyers of finished cattle look for uniformity when purchasing, and larger feedlots can more readily assemble liner loads of market-ready cattle. There are also opportunities to capture economic efficiencies associated with the purchase of feedstuffs and animal health supplies, and to more efficiently use human resources.

But what if the advantages of economies of scale could be realized without expanding your operation? If a number of smaller cattle feeders were willing to purchase feeder cattle of similar genetic background and adopt uniform processing, health and feeding protocols, could some of the benefits achieved by larger feedlots be captured?

Kowalenko feels this approach has potential for Saskatchewan's cattle feeding industry.

"The animals might be located on a number of smaller feedlots, but the operation would 'behave' as if they were all placed in a single, larger unit," he said.

Kowalenko notes that the concept could be expanded to include sharing the services and costs of nutritionists, veterinarians, marketing specialists or even a general manager.

"Using a common feeding protocol should ensure that enough of the animals reach market condition at any given time, allowing the producers to assemble liner loads of uniform cattle, much like any large feedlot."

(more)

Minor adjustments to marketing programs may have to be made to make this concept feasible. If the distance between feedlots is not too great, the truck may have to load at more than one location, or producers may have to deliver to one feedlot to facilitate loading of the semi-trailer.
"Normally, cattle are pulled in preparation for shipment prior to the arrival of the truck, so the assembling of a load shouldn't result in any significant time-delay in getting the animals on their way to market," Kowalenko explained.

Kowalenko feels that there is nothing stopping Saskatchewan producers from pursuing the pooling concept more vigorously.

"We have seen recently where some cattle feeders are consolidating their cattle marketing efforts," he noted. "Potentially, this could be expanded to include more areas of the operation."

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AWARDS RECOGNIZE YOUNG LEADERS

Nominations are now open for the Young Leaders in Rural Canada Awards.

This is the fourth year that the Rural Secretariat of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada (AAFC) has handed out the hardware to young rural Canadians (18 to 29 years old) who have demonstrated outstanding achievements and contributions to rural, remote and/or northern Canada, at the local, regional and/or national level.

Stephanie Clifford, Communications Advisor with the Rural Secretariat, says it is important to recognize the contributions that young people are making.

"We have incredible youth in our rural regions all across the country. These awards are about recognizing some of the achievements that are taking place," said Clifford.

Clifford notes there are three categories open.

"The first category is innovation. That's about trend-setting initiatives … things like green technology and so forth.

"The second category is leadership. We are looking for an achievement that has encompassed the spirit of leadership, something with a concrete outcome: for example, how a young person inspired people to develop and exercise their potential in their own communities.

"The final category is partnership. That's about building and fostering partnerships in the rural community, whether it's building a network to the provincial or federal government or other similar ties," explained Clifford.

A more detailed description of the categories and the eligibility criteria can be found on the AAFC website at www.rural.gc.ca.

The competition has attracted considerable attention in the past. Last year, more than 80 nominations were received from across Canada.

(more)

The winners will get to go to Ottawa to receive their special honours, but Clifford says there are a number of other intangible benefits for award recipients.

"Everyone knows that our youth are the future leaders of tomorrow. Recognizing their achievements gives them a sense of self-gratification," she stated.

"It helps to build their resumes and inspire other youth within the region, and that's a very important initiative."

The nomination deadline is April 16.

Eligible nominations will be assessed by a review committee representing the National Rural Youth Network, the Advisory Committee on Rural Issues, a rural/youth organization and the Rural Secretariat.

Nomination forms and more information may be obtained by calling the Rural Secretariat's toll-free number, 1-888-781-2222, or by visiting www.rural.gc.ca.

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NEW BROCHURE PROMOTES BENEFITS OF SASKATCHEWAN SHEEP INDUSTRY

A new brochure, "Why Raise Sheep in Saskatchewan?," has been produced by the Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board (SSDB) and Saskatchewan Agriculture and Food (SAF), aimed at promoting the growth of Saskatchewan's sheep flock.

"Saskatchewan is a leader in Canada in terms of the innovation, entrepreneurial spirit and drive of producers," said Tara Jaboeuf, Livestock Development Specialist with SAF. "The new sheep brochure is about those characteristics, and the kind of support that has been provided to the industry here."

The brochure notes that Saskatchewan's vast land resources and relatively low livestock density are distinct assets for sheep producers, providing a strong foundation for continuing expansion of the sector. It points out that land here is not only available, but also affordable. It quotes land prices of $139 to $225 per acre in Saskatchewan, compared to costs of $248 to $345 per acre in Manitoba, and $438 to $627 per acre in Alberta.

"The sheep industry has maintained its numbers and is poised on the edge of exceptional growth," Jaboeuf said. "The industry is ready for this growth, and the Saskatchewan Sheep Development Board is anticipating it."

Information on the SSDB in the brochure describes it as a highly organized and productive association. The brochure also outlines the board's involvement in the industry, including market development, research, promotion, extension and education. There is also discussion of the board's marketing system, which connects with buyers and brokers across Canada.

In Saskatchewan, there is financial support for sheep producers from government, including the Livestock Loan Guarantee Program and Feedlot Construction Loan Program, which are intended to give sheep producers the opportunity to start and/or expand their flocks with loan guarantees. SAF also funds the Livestock Predation Program, which assists all livestock producers in the management of losses from predation. The program is administered by the SSDB. Saskatchewan Environment also funds the Guardian Dog Program, which assists producers in purchasing guardian dogs to protect their livestock.

"We are the only province to start a value-added lamb processing business to promote lamb products," noted Jaboeuf.

(more)

Canadian Prairie Lamb Inc. was created to facilitate processing of lamb in Saskatchewan, and to add value to the meat by developing new products for the global retail market. The company currently offers eight different products, including seasoned lamb kabobs, two kinds of meatballs and a variety of sausages.

The new "Why Raise Sheep in Saskatchewan?" brochure is available from the SSDB website at www.sksheep.com, or from SAF.

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